

Minnesota Council on Disability  
1600 University Avenue W.  
Suite 8  
Saint Paul, MN 55104  

2022 Public Policy Agenda  

Tier #1 – Capacity Building  

Tier #1 are priorities that are led by MCD and include coalition building, advocacy, bill-drafting, working with chief authors, building support in the House and the Senate, working with the Governor’s Office, advising legislators, lobbying on behalf of an agency, and testifying in committee.  

1. Minnesota Council on Disability Budget Expansion  

MCD has an extensive list of duties established in MCD’s founding statute. However, the finite capacity of the current staff and budget restrains MCD from meeting all the diverse needs of Minnesota disability communities. A budget expansion of at least $750,000 per fiscal year would provide the initial funding to increase staff and programming capacity and specialize in specific, complex disability issues. See addendum for full proposal.  

2. State Employment & Retention of Employees with Disabilities  

Codifying into state statute the recommendations from the Task Force for the State Employment Retention of Employees with Disabilities. This includes improving the Connect 700 disability affirmative action program, providing better oversight over disability workplace accommodations, and extensive training on the hiring and retaining of people with disabilities for hiring managers. With more people with disabilities in state government positions, we will create a pipeline of new state leaders and policymakers who approach disability services from a personal perspective.  

3. Collection and Interagency Sharing of Disability Data  

Most decisions on disability programming and services are made based on existing data on disabilities. However, often that data is incomplete. Directing our cabinet agencies to be more proactive in collecting data on a wide range of disability indicators and fostering interagency collaboration of that data will allow for more informed policymaking. MDH and MDE especially. Better health data and collecting data on multiple disabilities for students.
4. Rare Disease Advisory Council

[Subject to RDAC approval]. The Rare Disease Advisory Council is seeking a new organization to be housed in and is considering MCD as a candidate. Not all disabilities are rare diseases, but all rare diseases manifest disabilities. Combining resources and staff capacity will create new opportunities for better advocacy on behalf of people with rare diseases. MCD is an appropriate facilitator because we can work directly with the state legislature and advocate for issues that affect the rare disease community, beyond clinical research and medical treatment.

Tier #2 – Interagency Partnership

Tier #2 Priorities are partnerships with other state agencies and include supporting agency initiatives, collaboration, advising, meeting with legislators, and testifying.

Interagency Priorities

*(Full agency names listed in next section)*

1. Communication and Broadband Access for Minnesotans with Disabilities

Many Minnesotans with disabilities face barriers to access broad internet and adaptive communication, especially rural Minnesotans and Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans. Expanding broadband and communication access ensures that all Minnesotans have access to services such as telehealth, health and security monitoring services, interpreters, and telecommunication assistive devices. This includes expanding the Telephone Equipment Distribution (TED) Program, Rural Broadband Access, and correcting language to ensure Telehealth access for DDBHH Minnesotans.

**Partner Agencies:** CDDBHH, DSD, DEED *(full agency names listed in next section)*

2. Hearing Aid Affordability

Hearing aids are critical communication and assistive hearing devices for many Minnesotans; however, the cost for hearing aids averages about $5,000 for a pair. Recent regulation changes have allowed over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids to be sold to increase competition in the market and lower prices. However, OTC hearing aids are not a viable option for those with severe to profound hearing losses. We believe a tax credit or voucher program for Minnesotans to apply towards the cost of hearing aids will make them more affordable or even free. It is important to note that we do not advocate for a tax deduction scheme because low-income Minnesotans do not normally benefit from a tax deduction.

**Partner Agencies:** CDDBHH, DHHS, DEED, DHS, MDC
3. **Accessible & Affordable Housing**

Affordable housing is challenging to find, and [Minnesota has the worst housing shortage in the nation](https://www.startribune.com), as reported by the Star Tribune. For Minnesotans with Disabilities, this is even more of a challenge because truly accessible units are limited, even in an affordable housing complex. We would like to create a mix of incentives and mandates to expand the number of accessible units, which would include requiring that all units with ground-level access should be accessible.

**Partner Agencies:** DEED, OIO, DHS, DHS

4. **Access to Mental Health Services**

Treatment and services for mental health are often cumbersome and difficult to navigate, especially while experiencing mental health struggles. We seek to reduce barriers and increase access to mental health services for Minnesotans with disabilities through telehealth expansion, Medicaid policy changes, and professional support.

**Partner Agencies:** OMHDD, GCDD

5. **Inclusive Higher Education**

Higher education options for Minnesotans with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDDs) are limited in the State of Minnesota. Currently, only 4 higher education institutions offer programs for Minnesotans with IDD. Expanding programs through grants and mandates for public institutions to develop programs & adaptive education curriculums for Minnesotans with IDD. It is also important to have IEP transition planning while students are in primary and secondary school to prepare for higher education programs.

**Partner Agencies:** MDE, OHE, GCDD

6. **Inclusive K-12 Education**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted schools severely, and students with disabilities have been disproportionately affected. We will advocate for COVID-19 recovery programs for special/adaptive education and IEP transition planning. We will also push for including more disability history and perspectives in K-12 curriculums.

**Partner Agencies:** MDE

7. **Parental & Guardianship Rights for People with Disabilities**

This includes eliminating discrimination against prospective adoptive or foster parents with disabilities and allowing guardians to open ABLE accounts.

**Partner Agencies:** DHS, DSD
8. Unemployment Insurance/Social Security Parameters and Income Thresholds

Social safety nets are designed to create a floor to prevent low-income people from falling into abject poverty. However, regulations and rules in the programs also create poverty traps through income thresholds, forcing Minnesotans with disabilities to choose between critical disability services or economic opportunities. We believe the American dream should not be out of reach simply because of a disability. Social safety net programs for people with disabilities are a right, not a privilege.

Partner Agencies: DEED, DHS

9. Expand Access and affordability of Dental Care for Minnesotans with Disabilities

Medicaid and other disability-focused health plans do not include dental care. Minnesotans with disabilities who can find dental coverage plans are often restricted to a few dental offices and service providers. This can force Minnesotans with disabilities to travel several hours from their communities to access dental care.

Partner Agencies: MDH, DHS

10. Transportation Access

Minnesotans with disabilities face many transportation barriers such as limited public transportation, non-compatible/adaptable vehicles, and restricted disability parking access. This priority will include supporting and funding micro-transit programs in all of Minnesota and helping DPS MVD expand capacity to process disability parking certificates faster and improve the user experience when applying.

Partner Agencies: MnDOT, DPS

Cabinet and Subcabinet Agency Full Names:

- Minnesota Commission for the Deaf, DeafBlind, & Hard of Hearing (CDDBHH)
- Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)
- Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED)
  - State Services for the Blind (SSB)
  - Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)
- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
- Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR)
- Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
  - Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD)
  - Disability Services Division (DSD)
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS)
- Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT)
- Minnesota Department of Commerce (MDC)
- Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)
Tier #3 – External Partner Support

Tier #3 Priorities are led by external non-profit partners with MCD playing a supporting role which includes advising, providing letters of support, and networking.

Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD)

MNCCD is our non-profit partner that leads the dozens of non-profit organizations that serve the disability community. They are currently considering and planning their public policy agenda. MCD will support and assist when appropriate and where our values align.

The Arc Minnesota

- Accessibility in Housing Requirements for housing projects that utilize bonding dollars
- Inclusive Higher Education (with MIHEC)

Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium (MIHEC)

- Inclusive Higher Education – Expanding Post-Secondary opportunities for Minnesotans with development or intellectual disabilities.

The Metropolitan Council – Metro Transit

- Expanding public transit options and improving accessibility on existing routes and lines

Addendum

MCD Budget Proposal

Current base budget: $1,038,000 per fiscal year + budget change: $1,778,000 = 72.25% increase

This proposal seeks to expand the resources and capacity of the Minnesota Council on Disability which has served the State of Minnesota since 1973. The request for additional operating funds is to bring our services up to a level that is mandated by our founding statute. Our agency is small, but delivers an outsized impact for the disability community. This proposal is minute compared to the resources and capacity of other state agencies. This proposal, if accepted, will deliver a high return on investment, adequately supporting our ability to meet increased demand which directly impacts the historically discriminated against, marginalized disability community.
We currently have two public-facing vacancies which cannot be filled with our existing budget. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice movement have created the need for a state enterprise advisor and civic-public engagement director to meet the demand for respective expertise. MCD also requires two additional supporting staff to assist existing staff with the statutory duties. Our current staff is wearing several hats to meet the high demand for these services; however, without more staff to alleviate the increased workload, meet statutory requirements, and expand capacity, the risk of staff burnout, loss of expert retention, and fewer disability policy resources is very high (in some cases we hold the only classified position in the State to deliver statutorily required services). Without a fully staffed and resourced Minnesota Council on Disability, the progress of disability equity in the State of Minnesota may stagnate or even reverse.

The MCD budget proposal includes increasing our staffing from 7 FTE to 13 FTE:

1. **State Enterprise Policy Advisor, or State Agency Relations Director**
   - 1 FTE Position | Planning Director Class | $110,000.00 | Step 2-3 $35/hr.
   - Increased requests for technical assistance and policy advisement from other state agencies such as DEED, DHS, MDH, MDE, DNR, MnDOT, & MDHR necessitates a full-time advisor with the state enterprise. This is statutorily mandated in MS 256.482, Subd. 5, Section (1).
   - Currently, this role is split between our Executive Director, Public Policy Director, and ADA Director in addition to their other duties, including public-facing responsibilities.
   - At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our part-time Policy Advisor was re-deployed to the State Emergency Operations Center as 1 FTE, deducted from MCD’s limited budget (nearly 10% of our total budget). This supports the need for a full-time State Enterprise Policy Advisor.
   - MCD was unable to hire needed administrative vacancies because the demand for the Disability Advisor to the pandemic response was a critical, life-saving request that our community could not afford for us to dismiss.
   - This role would serve as the policy and technical advisor for all cabinet & subcabinet agencies and collaborate with the Director of Public Policy in identifying legislative and policy priorities. In addition, this will free up the capacity of other roles for legislative & public-facing services.

2. **Civic/Public Engagement Coordinator**
   - 1 FTE Position | Site Prog Admin Prin | $99,000.00 | Step 2-3 $30/hr
   - This public-facing position would coordinate fully accessible public events and increase public engagement in disability advocacy and policy. The State, to date, largely excludes the disability community by continuing not to provide fully accessible virtual or physical meetings spaces, documents and feedback loops. We are one of few state agencies with the technical expertise and commitment to establish a fully accessible civic engagement program. Left unfunded, this lack of civic engagement would further marginalize our community.
   - The goal of this position would be to empower Minnesotans with disabilities to be more civically minded and improve intersectional coordination with other marginalized communities, particularly BIPOC Minnesotans. While BIPOC Minnesotans disproportionately have higher rates of disability, they are largely left out of disability advocacy spaces, which are predominately led by white disabled advocates. MCD recognizes that we must improve the representation of BIPOC Minnesotans with Disabilities not only among advocates but also among our staff.

3. **Access Specialist**
1. **Access Specialist Class**
   - 1 FTE Position
   - Access Specialist Class
   - $88,000.00
   - Step 2-3 $26/hr

2. This position is mandated in the following statutes:
   - Access Code Development, MS 16B.61, Subd. 5, Section e
   - Building Code Access Appeals, MS 16B.67, State Agency Reasonable Accommodation Plan, MS 43A.191
   - Disability Parking Certificate Restriction, 169.345, subdiv. 3
   - Special Vehicle Variance, MS 174.30, Subd. 2, Section (c)
   - WC Home Modifications, MS 176.137, Subd. 4
   - Section 1, Access Review Board, MS 471.471
   - Library Access Grants, MS 134.45, Subd. 2
   - School Access Improvements, MS 123B.58
   - Roundabout Design, 2010 Ch. 351 Sec. 68
   - Disability Plates, MS 168.021
   - Minnesota Council on Transportation Access, MS 174.285
   - Appeals, MS 326B.139

3. The duties of this position, which include advising state agencies, county & local governments, and private businesses on accessibility and access, are currently being filled by the Public Policy Director, ADA Director, and a part-time Access Specialist.

4. **Disability Policy Analyst**
   - 1 FTE Position
   - Community Svcs Program Spec 2 Position
   - $86,000.00
   - Step 2-3 $25/hr

5. This position would be a supporting role to the Public Policy Director and State Enterprise Policy Advisor through research, position papers, legal purview, etc. Assisting with identifying potential legislative and policy priorities, providing deeper analysis of the impact on existing or potential policies on the disability community, examining what other states are working on, tracking and following disability-related legislation, and bill introductions.

6. **Admin Support, Customer Service – Information & Referral**
   - 1 FTE Position
   - OASI Position
   - $73,000.00
   - Step 2-3 $20/hr

7. This role would provide public-facing customer service by answering constituent emails or phone calls, operating the office’s front desk, directing constituents to the appropriate staff or agency, and providing resources on materials on disability services, accounting, & data services.

8. This vacant position was not able to be filled during the COVID hiring freeze and then our pivot to responding to the enterprise’s need for our consult.

9. **Communications Specialist – Media & Graphic Design**
   - 1 FTE Position
   - OASI Position
   - $73,000.00
   - Step 2-3 $20/hr

10. This role would support the Operations & Programs Director, Communications Officer, and the Civic/Public Engagement Coordinator by creating educational documents, promotional materials, and multimedia graphics to further MCDs mission to educate, advocate, promote disability rights issues. In a heavily social media-oriented society, it is very important to have professional and captivating multimedia that stands out and informs the public.

11. Currently, this work is typically outsourced to vendors that we spend considerable resources to train in digital access. Continuing to outsource this activity is not sustainable for at least 2 reasons: the inexperience of industry trained professionals to provide adequate digital access and the absence of qualified vendors to provide accessible work.
In addition to the additional staff, this proposal is requesting funds for operational expenses and support for staff:

1. **Disability Workplace Accommodations**
   - $31,000.00
   - The Americans With Disabilities Act and the Minnesota Human Rights Act guarantee workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities. The Minnesota Council on Disability is unique compared to other agencies because most of our staff and Council Members are people with disabilities. This means workplace accommodations for disabilities are regularly requested, and MCD strives to be a model employer for people with disabilities. We work hard to ensure that our employees' accommodations are met promptly. We spare no cost to provide reasonable accommodations so that our employees can perform duties to the best of their abilities. Although we use Admin’s Centralized Accommodation Fund reimbursement program, we still experience a disproportionately higher expense to our budget than other agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has also dramatically altered the workplace requiring new accommodations as the hybrid workplace becomes the norm.

2. **Accessible Public Events, Communications, and Multimedia Production**
   - $35,000.00
   - It is part of MCD’s mission to engage with and inform the public on policy, training, technical resources, and collaborations. While all public events from the State of Minnesota should be fully accessible, this is even more explicitly important for public events from MCD. With nearly 1 million people with disabilities in Minnesota, the communities we serve require various accommodations from accessible public spaces, ASL interpretation, CART captioning, tactile interpretation, FM loop systems, multiple event formats, and streaming options. These accommodations are critical to our vision for a barrier-free Minnesota where every person with a disability has full access to all aspects of life. As a percentage of our total budget, these costs are considerably higher than other agencies. It is also essential that MCD serve as a role model to other agencies and organizations on fully accessible in-person and virtual events.
   - The State, to date, largely excludes the disability community by continuing not to provide fully accessible virtual or physical meetings spaces, documents, and feedback loops. We are one of few state agencies with the technical expertise and commitment to establish a fully accessible civic engagement program. Left unfunded, this lack of civic engagement would further marginalize our community.

3. **Database Development**
   - $70,000.00
   - One challenge with creating informed disability policies is the lack of specific or granular data on Minnesotans with disabilities, such as health income disparities, educational opportunities, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, rate of state services utilized, and geographic disability data.
   - We know that, for instance, as the State reported relevant pandemic data on age, geographical location, race, and ethnicity to epidemiological analysis, no data existed on people with disabilities. This kind of disparity is not only shocking but also life-threatening.
   - Developing and maintaining an internal database would give MCD the ability to track our requests for information and what kind of requests they are. This will allow us to report on volume, type, and geographic area they relate to (but remain anonymous to protect personal disability data). The database would also track our worker's comp claim progress.
• The database will track quantitative and qualitative data to measure MCD and other state agencies' impact on Minnesotans with disabilities.
• The database must be accessible, which will require a 6-12 months process of identifying the appropriate database and iterating and customizing it to MCD's needs.
• MCD has entered a preliminary partnership with DHS/Disability Hub to understand how relevant data is collected, informing decisions both legislatively and operationally throughout the State enterprise. And to take advantage of not starting from scratch with development.

4. **Professional Development and Networking**
   • $12,000.00
   • Critical to effective disability advocacy is the professional development of our staff. Our staff needs to be effective advocates and leaders in the state enterprise. With more well-trained and well-connected disability leaders advising on essential policies in our cabinet agencies, the policies that affect Minnesotans with disabilities will be a more informed and better representative of the disability community. Professional development and networking include professional development courses, fellowships, networking events both in and out of state, and visiting communities across the entire state.

5. **Office Space and IT for Additional Staff**
   • $8,000.00
   • Funds to support increased office space and IT for additional staff

6. **Annual Report to the Legislature and Programmable Review of services for people with disabilities**
   • $65,000.00
   • State Statute: MS 256.482, Subdiv 5
   • Minnesota state statute requires the Minnesota Council on Disability to report to the state legislature and the Governor on the effectiveness and adequacy of state programs, plans, and budgets for services to persons with a disability and for funding under the various federal programs.
   • These funds would be used to contract out to an independent organization or university to conduct a yearly audit of different disability programs or services which are offered or lacking across the state enterprise. The report will then be used to support MCD’s public policy agenda and help identify areas where MCD should channel its efforts and resources.